

Conserving Coyote Valley Agriculture Feasibility Study Phase Two

Meeting Notes, Advisory Committee Meeting #3

Friday June 22, 2012, 9 am – 11 am

Santa Clara County Open Space Authority

PARTICIPANTS

Advisory Committee: Jim Cochran, Swanton Berry Farm/ Co-owner, Food Commons; Erin Gil, Grass Farm/ Co-owner; Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Kevin O'Day, Agricultural Commissioner, Santa Clara County; Athena Pratt, USDA/NRCS/ District Conservationist ; Laurel Prevetti, Deputy Director of Planning Services, City of San Jose; Troy Rahmig, Conservation Biologist, ICF International; Paul Ringgold, Vice President, Stewardship, Peninsula Open Space Trust; Ken Schreiber, Santa Clara Valley HCP/NCCP/ Program Manager; Bill Shoe, Santa Clara County, Planning/ Principal Planner; Jennifer Williams, Executive Director, Santa Clara County Farm Bureau; Sarah Young, Senior Project Manager, Santa Clara Valley Water District

Observers: Matt Freeman, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

Project Team: Sibella Kraus, SAGE; Amie MacPhee, Cultivate; Stephen Hammond, Wallace Roberts & Todd; Carrie Kao, Cultivate.

NOTES

Welcome and Introductions

The team reviewed key points from the April 20th meeting: appreciation for the Study's recognition of the differences between North, Mid and South Coyote Valley areas; request for more information about the bare minimum to sustain agriculture in the Valley and the region; acknowledgement that 'champions' will be needed for successful implementation of effective strategies; re-affirmation that open space resource values have the potential to be an additional economic generator; request for more emphasis on the contribution of agricultural and rural areas to the quality of life in the region, and of the potential contribution of the Coyote Valley in particular.

The team also summarized some of the stakeholder meetings that were held in May and June, with City of San Jose, City of Morgan Hill and Santa Clara County planning offices; with the Asian Greenhouse Growers; and with conservationists and agriculturalists with expertise on co-management of agriculture and habitat.

The purpose of the meeting was introduced – to review and get comments on draft recommendations for actions needed to help make Coyote Valley agriculture feasible and sustainable. The financials were not presented since they are still preliminary.

Overview of Vision and Goals

There is some ongoing concern about several aspects of the general vision statement and the sub-area vision statements: still applies 'permanent' to the entire valley which is problematic; including habitat conservation in the vision for North may be a problem ; language for the Mid Valley should address the idea that agriculture would be an interim use. It was agreed that the Study will clearly state in the vision statement and elsewhere, that it supports all existing regulations.

There was a request to add a goal to the effect - 'To provide tools to growers to address problematic regulatory conditions'.

Presentation of Draft Recommendations and Background

The team presented an overview about draft recommendations, their connection with the vision, their programmatic structure and the phasing concept. The team also reviewed the updated Case Studies that have informed the recommendations.

The general comments mostly concerned the role of the HCP in the Coyote Valley. At this point, the Coyote Valley will not be affected by the HCP because no habitat priority areas have been designated within the Valley. This was a result of negotiations in 2005-2006 when an agreement was made to avoid creating conflicts between the HCP and the city general plans. However, given the area's (particularly the North Valley's) important connectivity and wetland resource values and the fact that the Pajaro Valley is no longer designated as a connectivity area in the HCP, discussions may be revived in the future, depending on a range of factors. Creating connectivity will require methods/tools with the appropriate scale, not dependent on purchase of opportunity sales of individual parcels. It was also noted that the species listed as for protection do not require connectivity per se, but do depend on the biodiversity conservation that is intrinsic to connectivity.

Other comments about the recommendations included:

- There was appreciation for the term Coyote Valley Agricultural Enterprise and Conservation program (COVAEC) because of the emphasis on business enterprise and the emphasis on a new program rather than a new entity for implementation.
- There is a need to better define the priorities to make next steps clear and feasible.
- There is a need to emphasize the role of partners in implementation and to confine the role of new staff to a coordination function except where no partner is available to implement a priority strategy.
- There is a need for a simple overview that conveys the 'story' of the Coyote Valley ag vision and strategies in a straight-forward and compelling way; could be a graphic and/or part of the executive summary.
- The strategies needed for feasibility of agriculture in the Coyote Valley should be extended to include all of the southern Santa Clara Valley.
- Prioritized recommendations for the Coyote Valley should be informed by the context of the broader region's agriculture economy and how the Valley contributes to and benefits from regional infrastructure and existing support structures.

- The \$250 million ag value in Santa Clara County is the base number, but with the multiplier effect, the total value may be closer to \$1 billion. Addressing this in the 'Making the Case' section is important.
- There was appreciation for the focus on technical assistance and marketing support for current farmers.
- There were requests for further information: (1) about what financial investments in agriculture would mean; and (2) about the potential for farmers to benefit from California's new carbon cap and trade program.

Comments about Case Studies

Jim Cochran elaborated on the new Food Commons overview in the case studies, emphasizing that this is a new, triple bottom-line business model. The City of Fresno has invited the Food Commons to implement a pilot program for a vertically integrated food system. The idea is to link the farmers to the distributors, retailers and customers in a system that is mutually beneficial to all and to the local/regional economy as a whole. To create this system, the Food Commons hopes to utilize advances in information systems, communications, and community-based organizational and economic models. It will draw upon the expertise of its members in the fields of finance, technology, community organizations, and sustainable agriculture. The project is in the early stages of development and has received \$250,000 in funding from the Schmidt family.

There was a request for examples, in the case studies or elsewhere, of where co-management for farming and wildlife has been successful.

Comments about the Phasing

A first priority needs to be efforts that help to stabilize current farming operations. This is an opportunity for multiple entities to get early involvement in taking on different parts of the program, which will also broaden ownership of the program.

Summary of next steps and wrap up

During the coming two months, the team will follow up on the comments from the Advisory Committee in developing the final draft Study. This Study will be presented to final Advisory Committee meeting to be scheduled for late August or early September.